Dramatic Doings and Those Who Do Them

By GEORGE H. PICARD.
[New York Dramatic Correspondent.]

IN this season of conspicuous dramatic misadventure it is a pleasure to record the fact that farce pure and simple—farce, that is, without any motive save to induce the free exercise of the risibilities—is experiencing a decided boom. While so many ambitious dramatists have been driven into the profoundest depths of pessimism by the failure of their product to effect a lodgment in public esteem the half dozen creators of the mirth provoking confections which are convulsing the town are highly optimistic in regard to the future of the American stage.

ROBERT EDESON, STARRING IN "A MAN'S A MAN."

It appears almost to be a return to the "Box and Cox" period. The farces which are now contributing so materially to the joyousness of the New York public are notably simple in construction, are charged with humor that requires no guidebook for illumination and employ few persons in their presentation. The fun, which is frequently of the fast and furious kind, is produced by means of situations which are highly improbable, but not less amusing on that account.

One of the latest and best of these gloom dispellers is "The Inferior Sex," now being exploited by Maxine Elliott at Daly's theater. This is a so called farce comedy devised for Miss Elliott by Frank Stayton, an English playwright who is comparatively unknown in this country. For a long time Miss Elliott was impatient to unfold this "laughlet" before an American audience, but circumstances were not on her side. First of all, the extraordinary success of her brother-in-law, Mr. Forbes-Robertson, in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" made it impossible for her to occupy her own cozy little playhouse without precipitating a family row. Again, there was not a single one of the other thirty-nine first class theaters on Manhattan Island which could be had for love or money until, after a long and weary period of suspense, a very Chesterfield among managers withdrew an attraction which had "made good" and was assured of a long run to make room for Miss Elliott and her playlet.

The public accepted the sacrifice, and so also did Miss Elliott. The public has not regretted its action, nor has the lady who was capable of inspiring such an outburst of managerial chivalry. "The Inferior Sex," one of the most daringly original and delicately managed literary tidbits ever brought to this market, is as clever as it is mirth provoking. There is only one woman in the play and only three or four speaking parts. What an opportunity for that one woman!

It may be affirmed truthfully of Miss Elliott that she grasps the opportunity admirably. It had been understood all along that she was one of the few women in the dramatic profession who could well afford to do without the reputation of being geniuses, even especially talented; that her more than abundant charm of person was sufficient. However that may be, she has surprised everybody by her really artistic impersonation of that only woman in "The Inferior Sex." From start to finish it is a situation which demands the most delicate treatment, and Miss Elliott evinces rare tact and intelligence in its development. She is certainly a living refutation of the charge against womankind implied in the title of her play.

More than this, she has made it apparent that she is a woman of the most amazing courage. What other American actress—a Frenchwoman might have done it—would have accepted conditions which prescribed the wearing of a single frock during an entire play, and a very simple frock at that? That is precisely what Miss Elliott does, for matters so shape themselves that she couldn't do otherwise. That surely is real heroism. In comparison the woman who enters the lions' cage in full view of the audience is a mere pretender.

The New York public is not unappreciative of an act of derring-do of such magnitude. Miss Elliott deserves all she is getting, and there is every reason to believe that long after "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" over the portals of her pretty theater in Thirty-ninth street she will be convincing the New York public that she at least does not belong to "The Inferior Sex."

It has been claimed so long and so insistently that the sidewalk ticket speculator nuisance could not be abolished that the recent successful attempt of Mr. William Morris to rid himself and his American Music hall of the incubus deserves appreciation. Mr. Morris is a man of action, intolerant of mere theory and ready at all times to take the initiative. He made up his mind that the sidewalk speculation in front of his theater should come to an end and at once announced his intention of "getting on the job."

When the open air ticket merchants learned of the justly irate Mr. Morris' proposition they did not take warning, but assembled in full force at the very next matinee performance and began to solicit trade from those who were entering the American. The proprietor was ready for them. He had taken the precaution to send to the nearest station house for a supply of extra patrolmen, and at a given signal those husky promoters of the public welfare emerged from their concealment in the lobby and proceeded to eject the illicit ticket mongers from the premises. To make his victory complete Mr. Morris stationed pickets at all the approaches to the American with orders to intercept all endeavors of the routed hucksters to dispose of their wares.

MAXINE ELLIOTT, ONLY WOMAN IN "THE INFERIOR SEX."

Mr. Morris has demonstrated the fact that the lobby and sidewalk ticket vending business may be brought to a sudden close. What are the other theater magnates going to do about it?

Mr. Fred C. Whitney seems to have arrived at the very apotheosis of managerial inspiration. His inventive genius—it is nothing less than that rare endowment—has provided the Casino with an attachment which no other playhouse has ever had—an inhalatorium. Now, the Casino has been the scene of many a novel experience, but it has remained for Mr. Whitney to confer on it a distinction which is absolutely unique.

After six months' wear and tear in the prolonged run of "The Chocolate Soldier" the voices of the members of the chorus began to show signs of deterioration. The music of this delightful confection is almost on a par with grand opera and is correspondingly exacting. It came to the knowledge of Mr. Whitney that many of the young women of the chorus and several of the principals were finding it necessary to take special treatment from throat experts.

So the idea of the inhalatorium took possession of Mr. Whitney's up to date "thinkery." He made up his mind to establish a private throat hospital in the theater, and when it was ready he installed in it a specialist and trained nurse. This dramatic inhalatorium—why not?—is a dainty affair, made entirely of white enamel, all its furniture and fittings of the most modern antiseptic construction. It has become the most popular feature of the Casino's equipment, and its beneficial influence has been demonstrated clearly. The improvement of the chorus singing has been marked, and there are no more awkward absences due to irritated throats. Hereafter the inhalatorium will accompany "The Chocolate Soldier" on all his travels.

A more recent novelty introduced by Mr. Whitney seems to suggest that the chorus girl's millennium is in sight. Led by the desire to add to the physical fitness of his singers and incidentally to obtain from them the best work possible, Mr. Whitney has hit on a scheme which is certain to make him the most popular manager in America. Realizing that his chorus did not secure the outdoor exercise necessary to produce the best results, he has arranged with a leading riding academy to have the girls given lessons in equestrianism twice a week under the direction of a capable master. When they have become sufficiently proficient they will be permitted to ride daily in the park. Talk of managerial enterprise!

The recent intelligence that a New York millionaire—name not yet divulged—is going to endow schools of dramatic art at Harvard, Yale and Columbia is provoking much discussion in theatrical circles. As far as heard from leading members of the profession are not in sympathy with the project. John Drew, for instance, voices his opinion as follows:

"Critics, like poets, are born, not made. A man must have eyes that see and a mind that knows the significance of what is seen, but a little erudition except in rare cases is apt to make a young critic pompous and cocksure. Earnest, sincere, fair criticism the actor welcomes, for in some ways it is a truer guide to development in his art than the response that he gets from his audience. He has a right to complain, however, of the flippant critic who sacrifices facts to scoring points. This critic is now gone out of fashion and in his place is the man who tries honestly to report what he sees from the judicial standpoint. One of the best critics I ever knew once told me that if he could tell the facts about a bad piece he never needed either satire or words of condemnation to make his criticism strong and stinging. And actors would rather take blame from such a critic than praise from a 'gusher.' A school of criticism might teach young men a great deal about the history and traditions of the stage and about the historical interpretation of classical roles which it would be well for them to know, but the great danger is that of 'a little learning.' What is most needed is a right feeling, a right instinct, that will guide the man when new situations confront him."

THE LUCKY BAT.

On the opening night of Otis Skinner as Lafayette Towers in "Your Humble Servant" at the Garrick theater, New York, a bat appeared from the scene loft. He chose a quiet scene in the third act when his entrance could not be overlooked. After several swoops about the smoking room of the Prentice mansion he went out into the auditorium, inspected the gallery and disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. Mr. Skinner was intensely chagrined at the titter that ran through the house, feeling that the scene had been made ridiculous. After the play he was complaining to Charles Frohman that his theaters should be made bat proof, when William Gillette, who was present, said: "Stop! That bat is the luck of the Garrick theater. The first time he appeared was during the telegraph scene on the opening night of 'Secret Service.' The good luck that he brought me he'll bring Lafe Towers. You wait and see." Mr. Gillette's prophecy has come true, and, fortunately for Mr. Skinner's peace of mind, he did not have to wait very long to find it out. The new play won in a canter.

FERDINAND GOTTSCHALCK, FAMOUS SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK.

JOSEPH JEFFERSON'S MANTLE.

In Jefferson's latter days, after he had left the stage, he sent for Francis Wilson. "Young man," he said, "you have greater powers than you suspect. You are a true comedian. You have the art of tears as well as the art of laughter. If I could nominate a successor for the place I have tried to fill upon the American stage it would be you." It is needless to say that if Francis Wilson needed anything to stimulate his ambition and industry it was these words from the dean of American actors. A decade has passed, and now it is recognized that Jefferson's prediction is well on the way to fulfillment. In "The Bachelor's Baby" Francis Wilson has not only shown that he holds the keys of laughter, but also the keys of fine and touching sentiment. He is, in fact, succeeding to the place so long left vacant by Jefferson. And the fulfillment does not stop there, for Francis Wilson has found in "The Bachelor's Baby" a play that seems destined to be to him what "Rip Van Winkle" was to Jefferson. Jefferson was the author of "Rip" almost as completely as Wilson is the author of "The Bachelor's Baby," and each actor fitted himself with a part in a way that another playwright could not well have done.

Skee Experts Tuning Up For the National Tourney In Coleraine, Minn., Feb. 19 and 20

By TOMMY CLARK.

EXPERT skee jumpers in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan are now oiling up their limbs in order to be in first class shape for the coming national tournament to be held in Coleraine, Minn., Feb. 19 and 20. This event is always eagerly looked forward to by the devotees of that fascinating winter pastime of the Norwegians in this country, who gather in thousands to witness the wonderful flights of the competitors on their spruce blades.

All the crack skee jumpers of the country will be on hand to take part in this tourney, which usually winds up the season, and when the contests start new jumping figures are expected. Extra inducements have been offered to the jumper who will equal or excel the record breaking jump of 144 feet made by Ole Feiring in Duluth, Minn., recently. Until then Oscar Gunderson of Spokane, Wash., held the record. He made 136 feet at Chippewa Falls, Wis., last year.

Skee jumping calls for great daring. The man who competes in one of these contests must have great suppleness and an abundance of courage, for the sport is as dangerous as high diving.

How Skee Tourneys Are Run.

Considerable expense is incurred in holding a tourney of this kind. The wooden structure which is erected at the top of a hill costs many hundreds of dollars. Hundreds of loads of snow are dumped along the course to make the grade approximately uniform.

The riders are started from a point on a slope 33 degrees from the horizontal and coast past a point where the slope increases slightly to the "jumping off place." There the momentum is so great as to impel them forward in a flight through midair to land in the soft snow beyond, and if the distance of a man's jump measured from the platform to the spot where he touches Mother Earth is the greatest he is declared the winner.

Usually there are more than a hundred competitors. For weeks before the great contests the members of the various clubs throughout the west busy themselves practicing, so that the competitors on the day of the national event represent the best the clubs have.

Stakes are set five feet apart for the benefit of the judges of the contests. The distances covered by the jumpers are measured in a manner similar to those used on a football field. After a jump into the snow on the course is raked, which keeps it loose, so that there is a downy bed for the other jumpers to fall into, even if the man comes down on his shoulders. To start the contestants a man is stationed at the "jump off" with a flag, with which he signals to a bugler at a certain point, indicating that the track below is clear.

SCENES AT RECENT NATIONAL SKEE TOURNEY ON HOLMENKOLLEN HILL, NEAR CHRISTIANIA, NORWAY.

The skee tournament held annually on Holmenkollen hill, near Christiania, Norway, brings together all the expert jumpers of King Haakon's country. Here a crowd of about 30,000 gather to watch the exciting sport.

No. 1 shows men leaving takeoff on Holmenkollen hill.

No. 2 shows expert gliding down incline at terrific speed.

No. 3 shows jumper experiencing a bad fall.

At the signal that everything is O. K. the competitor rushes from the hilltop down toward the little raised platform, a descent of about 300 feet, which is very steep. The rush gives him a tremendous impetus, and when he reaches the projecting ledge to shoot off the platform he makes a huge spring, all the time whirling his arms like a windmill to keep his balance as he jumps into space.

What Skeeing Is Like.

Skees are very simple instruments. They consist of narrow strips of wood, pointed and curved up in front, and are generally six, seven or eight feet in length and three or four inches in breadth. At the center under the foot they are about an inch thick, leveling off to about a quarter of an inch at either end. The undersurface is flat, often with a grove along the middle, and is made as smooth as possible. They are fastened on the feet by a loop for the toe, fixed near the center of the skee and a band which passes from this round the heel of the shoe and which can be tied very tight.

The motion employed in skeeing has no resemblance to that employed in skating. While the men are moving the skees are always kept parallel and as close together as possible and are not lifted from the ground, like the Canadian snowshows. On flat ground they are kept gliding over the snow. While being driven forward by alternate strokes from the hips and thighs the body is thrown forward in each stride. An ordinary skee runner is expected to maintain a gait of eight or nine miles an hour for any length of time. The longest race on skees, the distance being nearly 140 miles, was run in less than twenty-four hours, rests included.

Norway is the place for one to see skee sport. In fact, nearly every one travels on the spruce blades. School children, soldiers, business men, can be seen almost any day during the cold winter months gliding through the villages or cities on their skees.

In hunting expeditions the skee plays a very prominent part. Small game abounds, and a hare hunt is one of the favorite sports, as it involves a great deal of speed on the part of the skee runner. No one ever dreams of using a gun on these occasions. As the fox is run down in England, so is the hare run down by the hunters on their skees, and when reached dispatched by a short club. The wolves, reindeer, elks and other large game are successfully pursued on skees, with the difference that powder and lead do duty instead of a club.

Origin of the Sport.

Skees were first known to have been used in the thirteenth century. Eight centuries passed before the trappers, the lumbermen and woodchoppers of America learned the vast superiority of the skee over the Canadian snowshoe. In a century more the latter will be looked at in museums as the clumsy implement of the bygone age. Whereas some years ago only a few Scandinavian experts made a scanty living by selling their product to enthusiastic countrymen, skees of all qualities may now be found at any place during the winter season.

Since its introduction into this country several years ago skeeing has become immensely popular, especially in the west, where there is lots of snow. At the tournament held in Duluth, Minn., last year there were over 8,000 spectators present.

Nearly all of the great jumpers in the west are native born Norwegians, who have been in America not longer than four or five years, the skee movement here not having attained any headway until 1900, when the Red Wing and Ishpeming clubs were formed. Most of them are men who work as day laborers at other seasons of the year. Ole Feiring, the American champion, is a teamster, and Gustave Bye, another expert jumper, an odd job man.

LIFTING BAN ON FRESHMEN.

In suggesting that freshmen have their old prerogative of trying for varsity athletic teams Harvard university seems to have hit on a pretty good idea. There is no reason why first year men should be debarred from competing for the big teams. The rule keeping them out during their first year in college was made when football was radically reformed several years ago.

This rule was made to stop the practice of college athletes quitting one college for another, supposedly because inducements were made to particularly skillful performers to make the change.

Since the rule has been made it is noticed that it has elevated the morals of college sport, but at the same time is rough on the freshmen. If opponents to Harvard's suggestion declare that the abrogation of the first year rule would be a step backward and restore the detested condition of other years, there is a way to give justice to both sides.

Permit legitimate college freshmen to represent varsity teams which extend the maximum life of college competition to four years, but do not allow an athlete coming from another college play until he has been at his second university for a year.

THE ONE BACK FOOTBALL GAME.

The question of the legitimacy of the one back game at association football has been brought into consideration by the action of the referee in the recent sensational match between Liverpool and Newcastle United, at Anfield. In this game Liverpool gained a victory by 6 goals to 5. While the Liverpool forwards were keeping up a persistent attack in the second half one of the Newcastle backs repeatedly adopted the time honored tactics of moving forward so as to put them off side. The referee went so far as to warn the player to desist from his "off side game."

Now there is nothing in the laws of association football to prevent a fullback from standing where he chooses. The disposition of the field is purely a matter for the captain of the side to settle. If he likes to play five halfbacks and a goal keeper, with no fullbacks at all, he is at perfect liberty to do so.

A referee is not justified in speaking to any defender who takes up a position to put opponents off side or out of play.

WHERE SOCKER IS POPULAR.

Exact statistics are not available because they have never been collated, but it is not an exaggeration to assert that every week in England alone from 7,000 to 8,000 socker matches are played, of which not more than 300 are between professional clubs. There are fewer than 6,000 professional players, but there are something like a half million amateur players, and there would be many thousands more if grounds could be found for clubs to play upon. The London Football association furnishes an object lesson that compels attention. This is the largest affiliated association in the world, its membership roll numbering 1,409 to 1,500 clubs.

More than two years ago 58,000 persons were present when Chelsea met Woolwich Arsenal, but this record and all others for a league game were left far behind recently, when some 70,000 squeezed into the ground, including a large number who rushed the gates.